

Message Text

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SUBJ: SPECIAL GDR BICENTENNIAL OBSERVANCE

1. SUMMARY: UNEXPECTED GDR OBSERVANCE OF THE US BICENTENNIAL IN A JULY 22 PROGRAM IN EAST BERLIN INCLUDED SURPRISINGLY POSITIVE REFERENCES TO THE "PROGRESSIVE TRADITION" OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. THE EVENT APPEARS TO BE A GDR GESTURE FOR MOVEMENT IN US-GDR BILATERAL RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. A SPECIAL OBSERVANCE OF THE U.S. BICENTENNIAL WAS HELD IN EAST BERLIN JULY 22, HOSTED BY THE GDR LEAGUE OF PEOPLE'S FRIENDSHIP AND THE INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE ACADEMY FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE AND JURISPRUDENCE.

3. INVITATIONS TO THE EVENT WERE RECEIVED BY THE EMBASSY ONLY THREE DAYS IN ADVANCE. AT A DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION ON JULY 21, NUMEROUS GDR OFFICIALS, INCLUDING DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER HORST GRUNERT, ASKED THE AMBASSADOR WHETHER HE PLANNED TO ATTEND THE EVENT. NONETHELESS, EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVES WERE UNCERTAIN OF THE PURPOSE OF THE GDR'S "PROGRAM ON THE OCCASION OF THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES".

4. AMBASSADOR COOPER AND THREE STAFF MEMBERS ARRIVED BY
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CAR PROMPTLY AT 1:00 PM IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE OF MINISTERS

BUILDING AND WERE IMMEDIATELY FILMED BY TV CAMERA CREWS. THE DELEGATION WAS CORDIALLY RECEIVED BY THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE, HORST BRASCH, AND SEATED OVER DRINKS IN A PLEASANT ANTEROOM. AFTER FIFTEEN MINUTES OF CONVERSATION WITH MEMBERS OF THE HOST ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS, THE ENTIRE GROUP OF ABOUT FIFTEEN WALKED UPSTAIRS TO THE SPECIALLY PREPARED ASSEMBLY HALL AND AN AUDIENCE OF APPROXIMATELY 250 SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE LEAGUE AND THE INSTITUTE, AS WELL AS REPRESENTATIVES OF "MASS ORGANIZATIONS," AND DR. WERNER BETTIN, HEAD OF THE CULTURAL SECTION OF THE GDR MFA.

5. THE AMBASSADOR AND HIS STAFF SAT IN THE FRONT ROW AND OBSERVED A SMALL STAGE DECORATED WITH FLOWERS AND THE FLAGS OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE GDR STANDING SIDE-BY-SIDE. THE PROGRAM BEGAN WITH A CHAMBER QUINTET PLAYING MOZART. THE DIRECTOR OF THE STATE ACTOR'S SCHOOL, HANS-PETER MINETTI, THEN READ POWERFULLY AND WITH FEELING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN GERMAN TRANSLATION.

6. THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE, BRASCH, THEN GREETED THE ASSEMBLY, PARTICULARLY AMBASSADOR COOPER (WHO WAS PHOTOGRAPHED CONSTANTLY), AND INTRODUCED THE MAIN SPEAKER, PROFESSOR FRANZ LOESER OF HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PAUL ROBESON COMMITTEE OF THE GDR. LOESER DELIVERED A SURPRISINGLY POSITIVE OVERVIEW OF US HISTORY AND GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS. A COPY OF THE SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AFTERWARD TO A EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVE UPON REQUEST.

7. LOESER BEGAN BY CITING THE DECLARATION AND OBSERVING THAT THE "IDEAS THAT ALL MEN ARE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW, THAT FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS ARE THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF ALL MEN..., AND THAT IT IS THE TASK OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PRESERVE THESE RIGHTS..WERE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY RAISED TO THE LEVEL OF LAW BY THE AMERICAN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE." THE UNITED STATES WAS THEN ALSO DESCRIBED AS BANNING SLAVERY IN THE NORTH, PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS, AND ESTABLISHING A GENUINE REPUBLIC.

8. THE ONLY NEGATIVE COMMENT IN THE ENTIRE SPEECH FOLLOWED SHORTLY IN QUOTATION FROM ENGELS, IN WHICH THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION IS AT ONCE PRAISED FOR BEING THE FIRST "TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RECOGNIZE HUMAN RIGHTS" BUT CONFIRMING "IN THE SAME BREATH THE SLAVERY OF THE COLORED RACES IN AMERICA." EVEN THIS, HOWEVER, WAS TEMPERED BY A LATER REFERENCE TO LINCOLN AND "THE WAR AGAINST SLAVERY."

9. MUCH OF THE SPEECH WAS DEVOTED TO THE EFFECT OF THE DECLARATION UPON OTHER COUNTRIES AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF GERMAN-AMERICANS IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES.

PERHAPS THE MOST STRIKING SECTION WAS THAT IN PRAISE OF THE UNITED STATES FOR "THE WAR AGAINST FASCISM". LOESER RELATED A PERSONAL ANECDOTE IN WHICH HE HAD SERVED UNDER GENERAL MONTGOMERY IN LIBYA AND HAD HELPED TO SAVE AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO HAD WANDERED FROM HIS UNIT. FROM HIS GERMAN ACCENT, LOESER LEARNED THAT THE AMERICAN SOLDIER HAD ORIGINALLY FLED FROM BERLIN, AND THE TWO ANTI-FASCIST SOLDIERS, GERMANS SERVING IN THE ALLIED ARMIES, BECAME SYMBOLS FOR THE WAR-TIME COOPERATION OF THE SOVIETS, AMERICANS, AND BRITISH, AND FOR CONTEMPORARY COOPERATION AND CO-EXISTENCE.

10. LOESER LATER PRAISED THE "PROGRESSIVE TRADITION" OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, AND CITED THE CONTRIBUTION OF SELECTED AMERICAN WRITERS AND ENTERTAINERS AND LISTED AMERICAN VISITORS TO THE GDR, RANGING FROM MARTIN LUTHER KING TO US ASTRONAUT GERALD P. CARR.

11. LOESER ENDED WITH EMPHASIS UPON PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AND DETENTE AND CLOSED WITH THE WORDS: "MAY OUR GATHERING TODAY MAKE A SMALL, BUT NOT INSIGNIFICANT, CONTRIBUTION TOWARD THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA."

12. THE PROGRAM CLOSED WITH A MIX OF GERMAN AND AMERICAN CHAMBER MUSIC, INCLUDING A PIECE BY LEONARD BERNSTEIN.

13. AMBASSADOR COOPER ADDRESSED THE ASSEMBLY EXTEMPORANEOUSLY OVER THE MICROPHONE, THANKED THE SPONSORS IN THE NAME OF THE EMBASSY AND THE UNITED STATES, AND EXPRESSED HIS WISH THAT OUR RELATIONS WOULD INDEED CONTINUE TO IMPROVE. AND THAT ALTHOUGH OUR SYSTEMS WERE DIFFERENT, OUR GOVERNMENTS AND PEOPLE WOULD THRIVE FOR THE VALUES OF HUMAN SPIRIT AND PEACE.

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14. THE EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVES WERE LED INTO AN ADJOINING ROOM, OFFERED CHAMPAGNE AND A TOAST BY THEIR HOSTS, AND ENGAGED IN LIGHT CONVERSATION FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES. WITH NUMEROUS HANDSHAKES, THE AMBASSADOR AND HIS STAFF THEN DEPARTED.

15. GDR TELEVISION CARRIED A 30-SECOND REPORT ON THE EVENT THAT EVENING AND FOCUSED UPON THE PRESENCE OF THE AMBASSADOR. THE BERLINER ZEITUNG AND THE NEUES DEUTSCHLAND BOTH CARRIED SHORT ARTICLES ON THE SECOND PAGE OF THEIR JULY 23 ISSUES, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING QUOTE FROM LOESER'S SPEECH: "SINCE THE FOUNDING OF OUR REPUBLIC, THE PROGRESSIVE TRADITION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, ITS POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENTS IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, CULTURE, AND SPORTS HAVE BEEN HIGHLY VALUED."

16. COMMENT: THE GDR'S SUDDEN OBSERVANCE OF THE U.S.

BICENTENNIAL REPRESENTS AN UNUSUALLY POSITIVE GESTURE AND
IS PROBABLY INTENDED AS A SIGNAL OF GDR INTEREST IN
FURTHER MOVEMENTS IN US-GDR RELATIONS. THE SHORT NOTICE AND
APPARENT UNUSUAL LACK OF PRIOR COORDINATION ON THE GDR SIDE
INDICATE THAT THE EVENT MAY HAVE RESULTED FROM A RECENT POLICY
DECISION.COOPER

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